

Giddy Motions
by Will Goss

July 18th

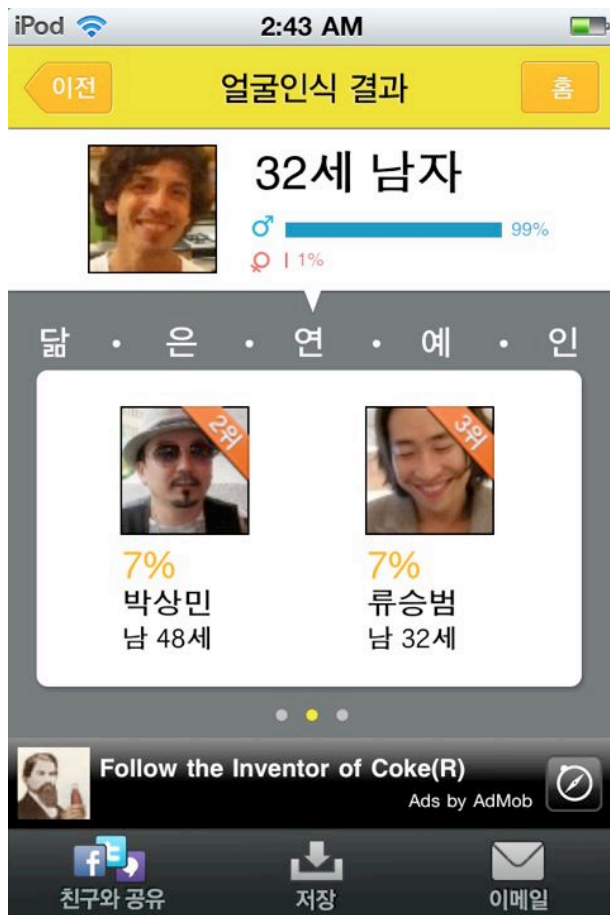
Got to the Chicago O'Hare International Airport in plenty of time. I ate a decent turkey sandwich from the kiosk and observed people. What did I see? Mostly Koreans flying tonight. Beginning to get acclimated already. In a mere 13 hours, I flew across the Pacific. In those friendly skies, I read and finished Lewis Carroll's little known masterpiece, Sylvie and Bruno. In one chapter, an extra long crocodile stands on his own head. There was an illustration. For dinner, I ate a micro steak.



July 19th

She looked like a vision when I first saw her. She also looked taller and older. Her brother Young Seo was there too... smiley and courteous. He drove us to the Lim's apartment in an SUV of an unknown make. Met the parents at the doorway and gave Mr. Lim a nice firm handshake, and Mrs. Lim an awkward bow. Without delay, to give myself all the advantages within my power, I gave them the gifts I bore: a black and white print of a Delta Blues joint called Po Monkeys and a blues CD of Lightning Hopkins. I ate a giant Korean breakfast and went to sleep. When I woke up, I was just in time for lunch. We ate at Je Je's friend Bobae's family restaurant. Traditional cuisine, friendly service, and FREE! The magic word. I ate a jelly fish, and I thought it tasted like a vegetable. After the feast, to hurry along digestion, we climbed a steep hill or a mountainette. Why? There was a Buddhist temple on top! Up there, we could

see the Incheon cityscape. The Buddha statues all had a fresh coat of gold paint, and they glistened in the sun. We went inside a shrine and Je Je bowed to Buddha. We then walked back to the restaurant, but not before sharing a snocone (a.k.a. pot-ping-soo). The produce man showed up, and he gave me a plum gratis. I sucked on the pit for some reason, and it was bitter. Je Je and I caught a cab to her Academy, and I joined her first class. The kids- were- RASCALS! One boy played with a snail for most of the class... until he killed it! The singular act of violence caused a general disruption. It was fun to see Je Je in teacher-crisis mode. She handled it well. After the class, I walked around the neighborhood and had my



first jolt of culture-shock. I felt conspicuously un-Korean. Later on, I met some of Je Je's co-workers. Lorna sticks out in my mind. She looks like a slightly milder version of Mimi from the Drew Carey Show. Crazy makeup. She told me about the 10-year separation from her husband and an endlessly impending divorce. Most people in the office ignore her. After work, Je Je and I went back to Incheon for some more family time. After din-din, Young Seo produced a lightly-played sunburst acoustic guitar. I played Conway Twitty's "Linda on my Mind" and Dwight Yoakam's "Ain't that Lonely Yet."

July 20th

Woke up early and took a bus to downtown Seoul. Naturally, I made lots of observations on the way. My brain was working, and it was 8:30am! Am I becoming a morning person? Korea is such a colorful place! The bridges, garage doors, manhole covers- everything has a dash of cornflower blue, lime green, and jack-o-lantern orange. These are the colors I remember. Hopped off the bus and skipped over to the ministry of tourism. Picked up five pounds of travel brochures. Our first stop was Insadong, a network of narrow streets made the narrower by vendor booths. We watched these two guys make a sweet snack that looked like horse hair. They sang a duet that described the process as they went along: stretch and restretch and restretch again that honey and flour until it is so fine and sinewy. We then ducked into a mall reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges' labyrinths. There were five level, all approachable by one winding walkway. Like the Guggenheim. The path up was so gradual I didn't realize the change in altitude. Je Je caught the shopping bug and bought a few accessories. She got a cute headband that is so her. Lunch-time! Very spicy pancakes the color of blood. After lunch, we took cute pictures together in a photobooth. Traditional Korean dress free of charge! Je Je had to go to work at three, and she left her Willy all alone in the big foreign

city. I sucked it up and did what any self-respecting male would do... I drug my butt to a palace. Changdeok Palace. I was so tired and hot by the time I got there, I almost didn't go in. But I did. My fatigue was to be the third wheel to Je Je and my adventures. I strolled around and let my imagination do whatever it wanted. I imagined ancient Koreans going about their business and experienced that historical thrill which only a geographical site can produce. I imagined an aspiring young poet walking beneath the eaves; I tried to think his thoughts. I studied the palace roofs, and I noted the aesthetic effect. depends upon the repetition of identical intricate designs. Viewed in isolation, one single emblem was shoddily painted and its complexity quickly laid bare... but fused into the multitude, the





emblems pulsed with a static intensity, like the Galileans waiting for Jesus to do a miracle. Je Je's art makes a lot more sense to me now! I left palace and found a hip coffee/edgy stationary shop. MMMG. Wrote three postcards and drank my coffee with milk- because they didn't have cream; hardly any place in Korea does. After the refreshment, I took public transportation back to Je Je's apartment, Caesar Place. Two-hour trip with four transfers; two of which were necessitated by a mistake. Everybody on the train looked cool. Seoul is awake to the latest trends, conscious to the changes in fashion. Rhinestones are very popular with women over 40. If shirts had words, they were in English, not Korean. I saw one girl with a shirt that said (well, there was text on the shirt; it wasn't talking out loud): it said, "I got too involved in my neighbor's business." Hmmm... an isolationist. Je Je was still at work when I returned home, and I passed a quiet evening with the parents. Mr. Lim and I looked at maps and compared our geographies. Clarksdale, Mississippi I found has a more minimal cartographic representation than Seoul.

July 21

Woke at 7am. Had I so desired, I could've gotten the worm this morning, but I chose Mrs. Lim's breakfast instead. Fish. Never eaten one of those for breakfast. After that, Je Je and I took a train to a different part of Incheon. We rambled about and took photos of us doing awesome stuff. Did the camera inspire our behavior? I don't know, but a lot of ridiculous poses now live on forever. We reached the end of our moseying, and came upon The Museum of Housing and Living. The inside of the museum replicated a slum village. Low lighting, snaking alleys, and roofs so low, you'd think they yearned to be a floor. There was a pack of children in the museum, all



wearing the same outfit, all using their outside voice. I smiled. The young resisting education in favor of play. There was a souvenir stamp chained to a desk. A boy was using it to stamp a plexiglass sign against the wall. His chap-erone said something to him in Korean and jerked him away. I looked at the stamp dangling from the chain. "That looks like fun," I thought, and I began stamping the wall myself. "Stop that," Je Je said. "The teacher just told the boy not to." I stamped my notepad instead, but the pleasure was bland and dull. There was a vintage toy-shop in the museum, and I bought a rubics cube-like toy that could turn into a cobra and many other wonderful shapes. We met the children again on the museum steps. I wanted a picture with them, so Je Je asked their teacher on my behalf. More than happy to oblige. I

made faces at the children to neutralize the language barrier. I blew a raspberry at the boy on my lap. He imitated my antics, and errant saliva escaped his mouth; it flew from the lips of innocence into the face of experience. I asked for it. We went to Chinatown next and had lunch. Black bean noodles. On the TV, there was a Korean soap opera set in a bakery. It was in HD. After lunch, Je Je walked me to the entrance of the Incheon Art Platform and then left for work. The facilities at the Platform were open and clean, achieving that aesthetic known as neutrality. It was 2:30, and I had an Incheon city bus tour at three. Time to go! I marched down to the station; the only drill sergeant being my innate sense of punctuality. Word to the wise... Bus tours are not gentle on a stomach full of Chinese food. I fell asleep to combat the nausea. A big crane in the Port of Incheon is the last thing I remember. When I woke up, we had parked at some futuristic reststop/busstop/maybe it wasn't a stop at all- in my dream-state, its function eluded me. I did a quick #2 in a state-of-the-art toilet and got back on the bus. Slightly less nauseous. My fellow passengers were 10 women over the age of 60. They were engaged in a trans-bus dialogue with the driver. The volume of each voice decreased the closer it was to the front. The bus driver had them in stitches. The laughter of these agey women sounded to me like a 6-year-old Mozart, who in the court of their soul, tickled the ivory. There was a precision in its lack of object. "L'Laughter pour l'laughter" as the French would say. They also clapped to the music on the radio... on both beats. When the tour had ended, I took the train back to Je Je's apartment. Mr. Lim was waiting for me in the courtyard. He had tried to call me, but I pleaded the cellphone 5th. I had not heard the ring. He was reading an essay about Abraham Lincoln. We went upstairs and he prepared an involved Korean desert (ice, sweet red bean paste, strawberry syrup, rice cakes, rice powder, and milk). Pot-ping-soo again! If you're going to eat a desert at suppertime, do it right! Mmmmm. I announced my plan to take a shower, but Mr. Lim reminded me of a promised bike ride. Oh, right! We took an elevator down with our bikes, and after he smoked a Dunhill cigarette, Mr. Lim put a bike-light on my handlebars. He said, "Follow me." We rode around the apartment and around the track of a nearby high school. Je Je returned from work, and I told her all about Guys Night! Je Je told me she had fallen asleep during class. After supper, I did the dishes. To turn the water on you stepped on a foot pedal. Advanced. Mrs. Lim thanked me more than my efforts deserved. When you're as skinny as I am, it's easy to pull your own weight.



July 22

Another day, another palace. Gyeongbok palace. This time Je Je came with! Before we enter the royal grounds, I took a picture with the guard at the Gyeongbok Gate. I kept a nervous eye attached to that costumed imposter, because I was afraid he might break character and scare me. But he just stood there, while halfway around the world, a Buckingham Palace guard laced up his boots and went to work. On the stairs of the central palace, we eavesdropped on a tour-guide (or a knowledgeable person- I don't know which) and we learned this juicy tidbit concerning daily monarchical life: after every royal dump, a servant transferred the emperor's feces into a silk pouch. The

pouch was then transported to a doctor, where he analyzed the poop and noted any irregularities. After so much grandeur, we sought out the humble simplicity of the palatial garden, conveniently located near the bathroom. I urinated in a toilet called a Lavatron. Je Je and I sat on a stone bench with no backrest as cicadas attacked our eardrums. Bugs positively scream in Korea. I held Je Je's hand for a moment and said, "This is nice." Goodbye ancient wonders! Hello modern marvels. We took a train down to Dongdaemun and ate lunch at Lotteria, two delicious bulgogi burgers. After lunch, we went to that consumer palace known as Doota! Within that 7-storey paradise, my fearless guide and protector led me to an optical shoppe. I tried on several spectacles, and my sense of judgment began to blur. This frame or that frame? Better here or here? I don't know!! Alas, I found what had been looking for me all along. White frames splattered with black paint. Very edgy. I tried on the glasses and looked in the mirror. (gasp) My heart leapt like a flying fish. Right up and out of the water; it leapt so high it drowned in the ether of its own rapture! What happened next? I'm having a hole in my memory, so we'll leap over it for the time being. I returned to the apartment in the early afternoon and listened to Dwight Yoakam's "Ain't That Lonely Yet." It felt like the first time again.

Later that night, we watched a drama based on traditional story, the Cat O' Nine Tails. In this episode, we see, in close-up, the tails sprouting underneath the protagonist's robe. I told Je Je, "This is going to give me a nightmare." It didn't though; probably because I said it would. The subway doors closed and the train of day disappeared into the tunnel of night.

July 23

Je Je said my head looked like a radish. And after many in-depth discussions and debates, I agreed to get a haircut. The salon was just downstairs. Before the cut, I had an instant coffee while the hairdresser waited in another room. I finished and announced that I was ready. The hairdresser was meticulous had a very athletic stance. After the snip-snip, Je Je and I went to Bupyeong Station to meet her cousin. We waited in a bookstore for Soorim, and she showed up one hour late. Later that night, I discovered that Soorim had told her father that we were late. The nerve. We had some street food for lunch. Chicken and rice cakes on a stick. The chicken and rice cakes were great, the stick was just okay. We then went to Holly's Coffee. Over a chocolate waffle and a Belgian hot chocolate, Soorim showed us Sugar Sugar Rune. It's an anime about a group of cute Japanese witches. In episode 51, this cute warlock named Glace shows up. I couldn't tell if it was a good thing or a bad thing. He seemed dangerously passionate. Before she left, Je Je suggested me and Soorim spend the day together. Terror! Absolute terror. I wasn't ready for this. With the swiftness of divine providence, Je Je arranged my fate and left me alone with her shy cousin. Conversation would not come easy. We left the our chocolate-smearred plate behind and caught a bus to Puchon. Our destination the Pifan Movie Festival. On the bus, Soorim asked about Je Je and I. I gave a simplified version of the romance, but the strokes were too broad. The resulting picture was oblique and abstract. Turning the tables, I asked her about boys. Did she have one? In Korenglish, she answered, "Last week... my boyfriend...



beated me." Oh no! You're not telling me this I thought. I avoided eye-contact to regain my composure. I looked at her fingernails and tried to name the strange shade of orange nail polish. I'm calling it neon tangerine. "You mean you and your boyfriend broke up?" I asked and jerked my fists apart. The look on her face, though blank, somehow communicated negation. We

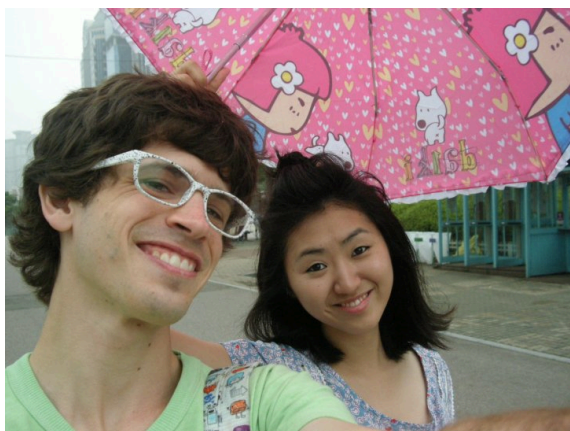


then enjoyed a silence mutually won. Before the movie, we stopped by a Dunkin Donuts. My decision. There was nowhere to sit at first, but then someone moved their backpack. I had a coffee with cream and a banana ring donut. I offered Soorim a bite, purely out of courtesy. I knew that fish wouldn't bite. The movie was called *The Encounter*. It was about a young filmmaker who stumbles his way through making a feature film and finds himself along the way. In the climactic scene, the filmmaker dresses up as an alien and dances for his sister's ghost. Watch the movie to find out why! They gave us posters on the way out, and we got on the elevator. The desired floors were selected, but the doors

wouldn't close. **WEIGHT CAPACITY EXCEEDED!** We looked around at each other and awaited the first voluntary sacrifice. Five people had to get off before the doors closed. Back on the bus, we rode the wake of our experience all the way back to our homes. Soorim tapped the headrest with her rolled-up poster baton. The white cylinder vibrated and came to a rest. It was the perfect visual counterpoint to the impressionistic ramblings of traveller.

July 24

Je Je and I bussed it to Comic-Con, an annual event celebrating the comic arts. Once a year, teens unleash their egos into a homogenous swarm and a sub-culture is reborn. We paid our 4000 won and went inside the convention. Holy cow! Imagine a science fair where no teachers were involved. The numberless booths were decorated with adolescent pride. The proprietors sat behind their wares with a quick eye to detect any admiration. I found a glasses cloth with a pastel-colored anime pixie printed on it. She is depicted in watercolor, and her image is dissolving into the fabric like the innocence of the teens around me. Speaking of which, Je Je bought a “rated” comic. This turned out to be a multi-step process: #1 Show your ID to a boy hidden behind a box. #2 Stick 2000 won through a hole in the box. #3 Receive the comic through the hole. We eagerly



flipped through the comic, but the images weren't so bad (a vague blowjob was all we got). I was more relieved than disappointed. I asked several costumed convention-goers for a photo-op. They knew the drill and struck a pose. Reviewing the pictures, my lack of imaginative attire looks much more ridiculous than their bumblebee costumes or bloody tunics. We went outside and found a wooded trail. It led us to a river, where a large party had gathered under a bridge. Suddenly, the costumes, make-up, weapons, and purple wigs fell away, and pure fellowship flowed between the banks of common interest. After Comic-Con, we went to Bukcheon. Clustered buildings, narrow streets, Europe-style. We ate lunch at a design museum café. I ordered a compact salami panini, and Je Je had a BLT. We shared our sandwiches. With a light lunch slithering through our intestines, we hit the street in search of art galleries. We found a promising establishment called Plant Gallery and went inside. Three smartly-dressed women were sitting at table. And wouldn't you

believe, the tabletop was at a 30 degree angle to the floor. The water glasses clung to the slope, wanting only a small jolt to send them sliding off the edge. One woman told Je Je it was part of the installation. Duh! The paintings were optically engaging, but not memorable. Bright fluorescent dots conscientiously splattered. I gave the gallery owner a copy of Magenta's Caress 3, and gave Je Je gave her a business card. Now... we wait. What did we do next? Lemme think. Oh yes, we went to the house of God. Je Je and I were sauntering within the ? Church courtyard, when two ladies spotted us through the window. Recognizing two lost souls, they invited us in for a little peace, tea, and serene conversation. The respite restored my spirits, and I felt lucky to spend a quiet half hour with Je Je. We wandered around Bukcheon some more, staging pictures, which are the fertilizers of memory of course, and we saw a cute couple who were posing naturally for a photograph. In a swift concert of movement, I ran up the stairs behind them, and Je Je snapped a picture. Was I in their photograph or were they in mine? That's a question for philosophers. We then took a rambunctious bus to Seoul Station. "What's Goin' On?" by Marvin Gaye was playing on the radio. It's 7pm now, and I am pooped. My legs feel like lead; not in texture but in weight. In this heavy state, Jiyeon suggested we go to Hongdae. My body said, "No," but my Will said, "Yes." Increasingly, my body intensified its protest: from "no" to "hell no" to "I'm about to faint, you better sit down" to "my face is vibrating like a cellphone." We'll get to all that later. We ate at a Japanese noodle place for dinner, and the food gave me about a AAA

July 24 continued...

battery's worth of energy. I was on borrowed time. We walked around the area and joined in the general festivity. We stopped to watch a band play, but for ten minutes the lead singer did nothing but banter. "No thank you," Je Je said. So we moved on. We heard a Hendrix-esque scrawl in the distance and followed it. When we found that sonic star, we truly saw a miracle. There was our guitarist seated on stage, while above his head two dancers dangled from a 40-foot crane. I didn't understand their choreography, but I liked watching them move at that altitude. In addition to music and dance, there was a video projection. On a modern-looking building nearby, geometric shapes moved around randomly. I watched the spectacle and drank half a Hoegaarden. We then went inside the modern-looking building and found a portfolio archive for contemporary Korean artists. Je Je and I flipped through them, eager to find living coevals. We were both successful. Time to go home! On our walk back to the bus station, I nearly fainted. I sat down on a

raised curb and waited for my face to stop vibrating. Je Je bought me a Gatorade and a Korean chocolate bar and we made it to the bus alive. When Je Je's parents saw my haggard, haggard face, they scolded their daughter. I said it wasn't her fault.

July 25

Friend day! We met Je Je's former roommates at the Doota! Mall. Bobae and Hounyeh were the names their mamas gave them. The girls and Young Seo shopped, while I wrote in my journal by the mall fountain. In vain I tried to compare the Doota! Mall to Dante's seven rings of paradise (I was reading *Purgatorio* at the time). I gave up the fruitless path and joined my friends for an enjoyable lunch. I ordered a salad, but that rabbit-food didn't satisfy. I got some sushi rolls to pick up the slack. I dipped the rolls in my leftover balsamic vinaigrette dressing. Fushion! We left the mall and went to a fabric warehouse the next building over. The inside boasted of yard after precious yard of lush, vibrant fabric. Je Je told me it was for special occasions, like weddings or bat mitzvahs. I purchased a decorative spoon for my roommate Balta. There is a ruby-like gem at the non-spoon end. We then walked to the banks of the downtown river. Chill time. Lazing on a Sunday afternoon. Two young men in blue polo shirts suddenly walked out onto the river stage and set-up a PA system. Mic-check. They exeunted and a man in an over-sized, boxy yellow suit walked





up confidently to the microphone. He glanced at the note-cards in his hand and began his introductory remarks. After the compulsory applause, two women entered from stage right. Je Je jabbed a finger in their direction. "Ah! Look! Traditional Korean outfits!" A prerecorded track began and the public performers began to sing. I wanted it to stop immediately. The voices sounded like aluminum baseball bats dropped on concrete. Discord and high volume each amplified the pain of the other. I listened quietly with a still tongue, for an alien should conceal initial impressions of displeasure. Through the sonic poison, I heard Je Je's gentle, yet derisive laugh. (Deep breath) I was in my native element and took a deep breath of irony. The next performer spoke through movement. Traditional Korean dance. She twirled and whipped two sashes of pink and blue around her ample frame as the wind twirled and whipped two sashes of pink and blue around her ample frame. After the first phase of her routine, she laid down the sashes and danced sash-less. Suddenly, a gust of wind lifted the sash off the stage and pushed it toward the edge. Somebody do something! Before the dancer even perceived a threat, The Master of Ceremony lived up to his title and rescued the runaway cloth. It would've been beautiful to see that sash floating down the river. After two more dances by the same performer (different costumes each dance), Young Seo had had enough. We found him smoking a cigarette on a bridge overlooking the river. He filled his lungs with smoke and sanity. We took a train back to Incheon. Family time, then bedtime.

July 26

Bobae's restaurant again. Time to eat like a king again! Time to sit on the floor again. We joined Bobae, Hounyeh, and their friend for lunch. Bobae's mother met us at the door and smiled that smile reserved for second encounters, one that weds the freshness of first sight with the warmth of familiarity. We sat down to another GIGANTIC meal. The waitress brought me a little seat with a backrest. It has never given an octogenarian such relief. I was stuffed before I finished my plate, so I put some of my rice in Je Je's bowl to dodge the



accusation of ingratitude. Skinny people spend a lifetime trying to prove that enjoyment is not directly proportional to quantity consumed. We dropped off Je Je at the academy and listened to Soulja Boy's "Crank Dat" all the way to the seaside town of Wolmido. Wolmido means "Pale Moon Island" and has a permanently installed carnival. The rides are clustered so close together, they seem to be the gears of a colossal machine. And since it was broad daylight, I could barely make out the blinking lights. I watched the pendulum of a Viking ship swing back and forth, I saw a Gravitron with an earthquake feature, and in the background a Ferris Wheel turned in anguish.

We took a stroll along the water's edge and talked between our bites of red bean ice cream bars. We drove bumper cars next. Suddenly, my killer instinct kicked in, and I wanted to destroy my new friends. I RAMMED into Hounyeh. T'd Young Seo, head on collision with Bobae! A voice inside my head said, "Will, you're getting too aggressive." A worker cut off the electricity to the cars, and we exited. I looked over my shoulder and the worker was lining the cars up against the wall. Above the bumper cars was a batting cage. I went in. I picked up the bat and the weight felt good. I was Achilles, the bat was my spear, and that pitching machine was Troy. Pitch after pitch I crushed that rubber ball into the net. "It's all coming back," I thought. The worker let us go another round for free, so I decided to bat left-handed. Cocky. I missed the first four pitches. In a panic, I swiveled around right-handed. The first ball almost hit me in the stomach. Too close to the plate! I swung at and missed the next three balls. Ugh! Ignoble humiliation in the batting cage! Luckily, no one saw my defeat. We drove back to Incheon. After dining with Mr. and Mrs. Lim (delicious as usual), we watched another episode of the Fox Lady. At the climax, a man was chasing a little girl through a corn field. He wanted to cut out her liver, so he could give it to his little girl. She was dying and needed a transplant. He chased her to the edge of a cliff, and she almost fell off.

July 27

Je Je and I scaddadled to the Seoul Metropolitan Art Museum. We walked in, and the first thing we saw was a large Nam June Paik piece. A television wall. The videos functioned individually and collectively, the way society should. There was also a Man Ray exhibit. His rayographs glowed on the paper! Man Ray had an eye for coincidental beauty: the most compelling example being an umbrella leaning on a sewing machine. After the museum, Je Je and I went to the Deoksu Palace gate. We arrived in time for the changing of the guard! They changed it, and Je Je and I took a picture with a warrior. I said goodbye to Je Je and went inside the grounds. Since this was my third palace in less than a week, I had to tell myself "Don't make this just another palace." I took advantage of an urban nature walk. The bugs were really loud, but they didn't mean anything by it. I walked myself under a long arboreal arch and sat down. Stone bench, no backrest. I watched two old men converse; one had an itch on his left ankle. Behind the main palace was a skyscraper. On the building, a billboard announced the G20 summit in 2012... if the world doesn't come to an end. After the palace, I had coffee and toast. The tiny café was packed, and Korean boy asked if he could sit with me. Sure! He told me he went college in Philadelphia. He was wearing an American flag hat and was reading a get-rich-quick book written by an American. He asked me if I like the hat. I said it was ok, but that I wouldn't wear it. He then told me the was an anti-American. I said,



“Good. That’s my kind of America.” “Disrespecting the flag?” “No,” I answered. “Doing what you want.” The conversation ended with a friendly departure. On the train home, an older businessman with a manila folder said hello to me. Kindness always comes as a surprise. We talked about weather-differences in Chicago and Korea. He asked me where I was going, and when I answered, he let me know I was on the wrong train. He set me aright. That night, Je Je’s first cousin came in town from Los Angeles. He had a mini-fro and liked clubs over museums. He was very friendly and invited me to go clubbin’. The Lims and cousin talked family-talk well into the night. Language barrier! Didn’t sleep well. I woke up at 6am and read Dante in the courtyard.

July 28

Je Je and I watched Christopher Nolan's Inception. I liked it just as much the 2nd go-round. Mind-bender, dude! After the movie, we walked around the Incheon neighborhood. Very hot and nowhere to go. Je Je and I contemplated a massage, but took a taxi home instead. We ordered black bean noodles and went to the academy together. I helped teach one class. During her break, Je Je and I took a walk and had a nice relaxing conversation at an outdoor exercise area. Je Je did the elliptical machine and told me she wanted to find a studio apartment in Chicago.



July 29

I hung with Bobae sans Je Je. We walked around the Bupyeong Market, and I tried on a pair of women's purple pants. They fit too well so I didn't buy them. I like my pants like I like my prose... baggy. Bobae and I got an Americano and a Green Tea Latte respectively and sat down for a serious, yet pleasant conversation. We talked about privacy in the domestic sphere, as it pertained to the US and Korea. After the tete-a-tete, I took a train to the Namdaemun Market place. It was a bustling scene. Everything was for sale! A guy was giving away old lady shirts for 2000 won, I fought grandmoms for the choicest apparel. Yes, we have the same taste. Shiny and colorful. I ate at a dingy diner, and I once again tried to acquire a taste for radishes. Yuk! Maybe next time. I settled my bill and walked to the Chong Dong Geokdong Theater. When I got there, Mr. Lim was smoking a cigarette in front of the entrance. We had 2 tickets to a play called Miso. Traditional story, traditional costumes, traditional music, traditional dancing. In a word, traditional. We drank some complimentary tea and found our seats. There was no dialogue, and the basic plot of the narrative was communicated visually. Mr. Lim supplied the finer points via text messages. He typed things like, "She is a fortune teller." After the play, we ate a chicken sandwich at KFC and took a bus back to Incheon. Mr. Lim watched the news on his phone, and I wrote in my journal.

July 30

Back to Hongdae for some Super 8! We wore our homemade costumes and performed on the street. Je Je was wearing an orange and silver traffic controller's orange vest. As a cinematographer, it was easy to make her look cool. We came across a table of neglected food outside a restaurant, and I asked Je Je to get a shot of the flies feasting in a noodle bowl. While she was shooting, the proprietor looked out from the door-window and emerged. He looked like he hadn't slept or bathed for quite a while. I expected a "get off my premises," but he invited us inside the restaurant. At every table, leftovers from the night before lingered and decayed. LP covers hung on the wood-paneled walls (Elton John and Perry Como to name a few). We talked to him for the length of one slowly-smoked cigarette and left. Next we went to an art gallery archive. It contained books, pamphlets, and other records of past gallery openings. My favorite item was a framed photograph of a person in a gorilla suit. He or she is lighting a Buddha statue on fire with a lighter and hairspray. We left the archive and met Je Je's middle school friend Soumee and her really nice boyfriend. They



are an intimidating super couple; always doing something cute. We ate at a Japanese restaurant and kind of got to know each other. Soumee is in design; her beau, who served with the US military, is studying to be a French teacher. Afterward, we went to the Hello Kitty Café. Pink pink pink. A little red and a little white. Je Je got a Green Tea Latte to go and went to work. Without her help, the conversation floundered like a flounder. We made it to an ice-breaking topic somehow, and were able to enjoy each other's company. The couple left me, and I went back to the Archive for a rooftop performance. Up on the rooftop, there was a nice little shindig happenin. People were drinkin and smokin and talkin around four giant teacups filled with water. Children ran through the

party with super soakers. What more do you need? The performance began. A guy in a red unitard came out with a birdcage on his head. In the middle of the performance, he threw a glassful of grape tomatoes at the audience. I got hit in the shoulder. Next, I went to a concert. Some local college bands were playing. The show was sponsored by the Davidoff cigarette company, and their logo was everywhere. Did I come to buy cigarettes or listen to music? The bands, while together, showed not the slightest trace of creativity. One band did a horrible cover of "Doctor doctor, give me the cure." I got a free pack of cigs for Mr. Lim and left.

July 31

3:57; 3:58; 3:59 “Ring ring rrrrring!” Get up Je Je! Get up Young Seo! Get up Willy and Soomi! It’s time to go! At 4am, we hit the traffic-choked highway and drove south to Gyeong Ju. Young Seo was captain of the ship and steered the vessel into a filling station. \$80 for a tank of gas! You believe that? Young Seo pounded an ice coffee, turned up the volume on his modified car stereo, and put Seoul in the rearview. My sleepy mind locked-in to the brisk tempo of Korean Pop music, and I began to apprehend the passing landscape. The con-



struction sites on the edge of town looked mystical in the haze. We had driven nigh 3 hours when we pulled into a rest stop. Here was not your get-in-get-out American-style roadjob. No siree. The grandeur and variety seen in this paradise threatened to eclipsed the destination itself. We ate and drank our fill, and on the way out, we wisely drained our bladders. We split-up our group, momentarily, and entered the door-less bathrooms of our gender. Where were the urinals and sinks? Have I strayed into the lavatory or Eden? Large tropical plants cloaked the porcelain fixtures while caged birds sang a chipper song. I peed freely and whistled along with my feathered friends. Four hours later and 250 miles closer to the equator, we were there. We found a place called the “Will Motel,” but predictably, it was booked. Young Seo tried another lodging establishment nearby. He got a figure, talked down the price, and came back with a secure space. We drove through the entrance curtain and found a parking spot in the hotel lot. Next, we went to- Wait. What’s that? Why was there an entrance curtain? It functions to conceal adulterous license plates! We were staying in a love nest. Our room had a king-sized bed, a plasma, and adjustable, blue-Lighted panels behind the bed. We left our sexy suite and hit the street. Oh my Lordee it was hot outside! We went to the Gyeong Ju history museum to beat

the heat. Saw some old stuff and some real old stuff. Je Je and I turned our general conversation to anthropological matters. My thesis: it is very significant that human beings decorate things. An ancient jar with a little bird on top prompted my musings. Near the museum was an old bell. Je Je told me it had won the distinction of best-sounding bell in Asia. A child was sacrificed to make the bell ring. In defiance of the heat, we went to a lotus garden and frolicked around like little hippies. I blew up a few balloons and we stuck umbrella toothpicks in our hair. We shot a short film in Super 8. Here's the plot: us running around acting silly. We then humped it to a temple. When you love color as much as me, you cannot get enough of those hanging multi-colored Chinese lanterns. I ran below them at a terrific sight-blurring speed. Phew! I don't often run, and I get really thirsty when I do. I shared a can lime Gatorade with Je Je, and we sat down in the shade. Stone bench, no backrest. Everyone was showing signs of fatigue. Dinner time? Yes, kailbe-time! That's Korean BBQ. The restaurant gives you raw marinated beef and you grill it on the coal pit built into the table. I told my grandmother about this and she said, "What are you paying them for?" We drank instant coffee after dinner and continued our tour of attractions. Next on the list: large earthen mound-tombs. My mind wandered away from the monument itself and drifted to the mound-builders. Surely suspicion and doubt crept into the after-work chats. And someone must've solidified the vaporous discontent into clear statement of resistance. Je Je thought the workers were more concentrated on the task at hand than on philosophical quibbles. "Life was more complicated in other ways," she said.

July 31 continued

After the tomb, we went to another tomb. This mound provoked a much different response than the previous one: whoa! the curve of the slope is so steep: how do they cut the grass at that angle? I used to be a lawnboy. Darkness fell and the lamps along the forest lane switched on. The soft orange light and the silhouetted trees conjured up a romantic atmosphere. I said, "This is the kind of walk where lovers hold hands." My girlfriend, opposed to pda of any kind, relaxed her principles and held my hand for ten long and delicious seconds. Hand in hand we approached the Astronomy Tower. It looked like a chess rook, the astronomy tower did. Spotlights lit the humble structure from the bottom in an effort to magnify its grandeur. I thought the ruse unnecessary. Here was a fortress built to tame the chaos of the heaven. Our last stop were the pagodas on the lake. Finally, I got to see the picture on all the advertisements. It felt eerily familiar. Yawn! We took off our tourist badges and turned our steps

homeward. I had to sit down halfway to the car, because my metal hips mutinied. Young Seo and Soomee fetched the car. Suddenly, with out pre-meditated intrigue, here I was, alone with Je Je at the edge of a lotus garden! We watched the tourists tour, and she asked me why people like taking pictures in front of lotus flowers. I hastily offered a reasonable explanation, saying that such gardens were outside the experience of most people and therefore desirable. Je Je agreed but was not satisfied with such an unimaginative answer. So I tried again. "The lotus has a dangerous beauty," I said. " It grows in swamps that are unapproachable without the aid of manmade paths. The quest to attain their beauty comes at a cost, and it is the cost that sanctifies the quest." The car came, and we went back to the love motel.

August 1

Who puts a palace on top of a mountain? How rude! By the time we got there, I had to sit down for a rest. Five minutes did the trick. The natural, secluded environment of the Shilla Palace produced a more harmonious effect than the palaces in Seoul. One did not have to recontextualize the buildings in the urban landscape.

There was a statue of a golden pig in the courtyard and we waited in a short line to pet its unyielding fur. Like many tourists before and many to come. I asked for a sip of water and noticed our canteen was running dangerously low; we need to find a concession stand or a natural well. We found the latter. I dipped my wrists into the water, because when I was young, someone told me the wrists store the most heat. We filled our bottle and walked back to the car. The way down the mountain was windy, as all civilized roads must be, but straightened its ways when we reached the bottom. Suddenly, the car began to emit an unpleasant odor. Young Seo pulled Over and called his mechanic/dad. While the car cooled down, we ourselves found a place to let off some steam. In the valley below was a small and rather Unattractive stream. It seemed to have history connected with industrial draining. "Whatever," I thought, and I stripped down to my boxers and let the cool water work its magic. Refreshment! I changed while the ladies looked away and we got back in the car. Young Seo started the engine (no smell this time) and drove us to the beach. I was sitting on the back seat and had my feet out the window. The setting sun and the passing wind gave my leg-hair a divine and mobile glow. We listened to "California Dreaming" all the way to the sea. The water was cold to my naked shins and the rocky beach was sharp to my bare feet, but I was not dismayed. These discomforts only added a mild tang to the calming scene, like a dash of lemon in a smooth vanilla sorbet. Out from the shore was a rocky island; the burial site of a king it is told.



August 2

Je Je took me to the Incheon Bus Terminal at 11am. We shared a strawberry smoothie and waited for the Gwangha bus. Number 151, all the way to the Lotus Lantern Temple. I caught the bus and showed the driver Je Je's handwritten directions. The driver glanced at the paper very briefly and gave it back to me. Had he read it? His eyes told me nothing... which is never comforting. I took a seat and ate the 2 corn-cobs Mrs. Lim packed for me. I read a Joan Didion essay while I munched. It was a mildly interesting account of Joan Baez's peace school. 2 hours passed with no temple, and I moved to the front of the bus; I hoped my presence would remind the driver of his charge. Had we passed it? Was it up ahead? I had zero idea. Finally I got my answer. We pulled into a gravel parking lot, and he turned off the engine. Not good. I showed the driver the paper again. He read it this time and held up 6 fingers (on two hands of course). 6 minutes. Gotcha. While I waited, I watched a guy put up barricades around a construction site. The bus went back in the exactly same direction, and luckily, I saw a sign for the Lotus Lantern Temple. Stop! I scanned my transit card and got off. The way to the temple took me down a country lane, where white moths beat their wings softly into the grassy air. I reached the temple center and found a burly Russian under a veranda. He had a towel draped over his laptop and his head. I silently asked for help, and he led me to the information office. I paid my 40,000 won and was led to a bed-less bedroom, where gray monk-clothes waited for me on a little table. I was in my boxers when an agey man emerged from the bathroom. My new roommate was around 60 I think, 5'7", and about 160 lbs. He had a slight hunchback that became more pro-



nounced when he meditated. We shook hands with the assurance of a second encounter. My host came back for me and led me up garden steps to the temple. She opened the spring-hinged screen door, and I entered... warily I might add. I took a mat from the stack against the wall and laid it next to the burly Russian. He told me to scoot back a little bit. A monk, also Russian, appeared before us and led the service. He chanted while he beat a wooden orb with a stick. Everyone bowed to the rhythm. Half a step behind, I mimicked the actions. After three bows, my back needed a break. After the service, the monk pointed me to the meditation hall. I found an open mat and sat down. I tried to chill out, but the physical pain from the temple followed me screaming into the zone of tranquility. Sitting in Korea is a daily challenge for me, because I can't sit cross-legged- that's on account of my artificial hips. So, when I sit on the floor, I have to sit with my legs out straight and hands behind me. This position exacerbates back-pain and negates any possibility of separating mind and body. I meditated, instead, in the adjacent room. There was a chair. I listened to the sound of my short, tense breaths. Later in the night, I conversed with the Russian monk. He told me to wear socks in the temple next time. He also gave me a crash course in Buddhism. His words rang true, because they issued from the solid bell of quiet conviction. He told me about the path to Enlightenment and where it lies. He believed in another dimension outside logical thought. I then took a shower and lay down. First it was the mosquitos, then it was the howling dogs outside my window, and finally it was my roommate's snoring: each disturbance took turns in keeping me awake all night.

August 3

I got about 3 hours of sleep-esque sleep before I heard a repetitive percussive sound. Already in my monk clothes, I jumped up and went into the morning night. On the way to the temple, I saw a monk walking through the garden with a flashlight. He was far away, and seemed to be looking for something. I'll never know. The temple service was beautiful at that early hour. The deprivation of sleep had numbed my critical faculties, and I received everything as it came. I followed the syllables of the chant as I stared into the closed eyes of Buddha. After the service, I lingered in the garden. A young woman joined me at the lily pond and asked, "What are you doing?" "Looking at frogs," I said. "I see. Are you counting them? How many are there?" "No, just looking at 'em."



And she walked away as quietly as she'd come. Alone again, I looked down and found a four-leaf clover. 7am, time for a nap! When I awoke, the monk was waiting for me in the doorway. I had expressed a wish the night before about having a calligraphy lesson. He took me to the library, and left me alone to manage that wild ink. I traced a Buddhist maxim in Chinese, Korean, and English. It was hard to get the right amount of ink, for to err on the side of excess is no more laudable than falling short. Lunch was, as I expected, bland and nourishing. I did my own dishes, a requirement, and received compliments for my attention to detail. 1pm. Time to catch the bus home. But wait! My roommate was driving back to the city, and if I wouldn't mind stopping by his work, he would give me a lift. For real? "It's no trouble," he said. Well in that case... We had driven for 30 minutes, no radio, no talk, when my sleepless night reminded me of our night together. I leaned my seat back to a position which still could be considered sitting up, and closed my eyes. When I awoke, we

were needling through industrial back-alleys. How did we get here? We went past an office building with a badminton court in the front yard, and turned into a gravelly driveway. He stopped the car at a silver gate. It opened, and we went through. Access granted! The office was all dust and files. Time had meticulously and evenly applied a film of filth. Roomy made me some instant coffee and took me on a tour of the grounds. He moved me through the manufacturing process, as if I myself, were a casting (their chief product). I didn't quite understand what was going on, but what was clear was his pride. His love and enthusiasm kept my attention obedient and at heel. After the factory, he dropped me off at the Puchon train station. I thanked him.

August 4

Good brother Young Seo drove us to the Nam June Paik Art Center. By now, "us," you must know, is Je Je and I. In the lobby were 20 aquariums with 20 fish. In the lobby were 20 televisions behind 20 aquariums filled 20 fish. The TV screens flickered recycled images from a culture submerged in media. "Wow!" I said. "Poor fish," said Je Je. We read the introductory wall-text, and entered the museum proper. We parted momentarily to follow our own interests and wandered through NJP's corpus like a curious parasites, feeding a little life with dried tubers. We met together at the museums' nucleus and found an indoor garden. But a run-of-the-mill conservatory this was not! Through the stalks and foliage there glowed television screens of all sizes. Power cables and vines intertwined in a beautiful symbiosis. TV gives us transmissions of our identity. Je Je



got a purse from the gift shop. It had a picture of the moon and the text: "The Moon is the oldest television." Young Seo drove us to Je Je's academy next. En route, we dropped by the apartment to pick up Mrs. Lim's acoustic guitar. Guitar? English-speaking academy? I don't get it. I was to make a special guest appearance in Je Je's first class. When it was time to go on, I walked into that closet-sized classroom like Angus Young. The guitar magnetized the children's attention. They expected awesome things, and I wasn't gonna let them down. We sang "Row Row Row Your Boat," "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," and "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain." I got the lyrics of "Twinkle" mixed up, and on the first go-round, we sang, "Up above the world so high, like a fire in the sky." Je Je corrected me, and cut short my apocalyptic vision. We had five extra minutes at the end, so I gave them a bonus solo performance of "Puff the Magic Dragon." I let them touch the guitar on their way out. The loudest kid clung to

my right bicep and wouldn't let go. He wanted to feel my muscles. I skipped the next two classes to ramble around the academy. My gaze flitted here and there, my tourist mind eager to apprehend but not to possess. Like a fisherman catching and releasing fish on those fishing TV shows. Inadvertently, I saw a little boy's butt through a street-level window. A woman yanked the boy's pants down, and in my peripheral vision, I saw a flash of white. I passively explored for another half hour, when a little sprinkle brought me back to the Academy. Je Je's final class was a one-on-one session with Mr. Quiet. His silence resembled the deep-seated despondency of an adult whose years and years of regret and shame have encumbered his organ of speech. To rouse his enthusiasm, Je Je said, "Would you like to hear some music? He knows how to play the guitar." He did not want to hear some music. His honesty humbled me. Je Je prepared her lesson plans for the next day, and I played "Hey Joe" for her co-worker Lorna.



August 5

Double Date! We met the super couple, Soomi and boyfriend, and took a bus to Seoul University. The top Uni in the citay. The first sight of the tour was began, naturally enough, at the entrance. Bending over the street was an angular arch; it looked like a mathematician designed it, like it's proportions held some special significance. Je Je and I took a hilarious picture in front of it, and the super couple copied our poses. We then walked a short distance to the Modern Art Museum. The special exhibition was not so special and the permanent collection should've been temporary. One egregious example was a shadow-drawing of a fox. Picture this. A light on the floor shown upward through cut-outs projecting from the wall. The cut-outs cast a shadow in a crude shape of a fox. Sounds cool? It wasn't. I got tired so I sat down on a chair. It was art, so I had to get up. We said goodbye to culture and struck out on campus. We paused by a played-upon football field and watched what looked like a practice. We weren't the only interested spectators, for I saw a young boy squatting in the weeds, looking on. He watched the older boys run fast, kick hard, and take giant gulps of Gatorade. There was a mountain in the background, a positive addition to any scene. We walked on, and Je Je suggested we enter the history museum. Secret motive: air conditioner. But knowledge and comfort rarely go together. So I pleaded for us to continue our lively, sweaty romp. Who knows what mysteries lay just on the other side of exhaustion? My enthusiasm was not contagious, but my native guides obliged me. We walked on and found the art school. I bumped into a sculpture studio and there was a real-life working artist. I announced my presence. Je Je translated, shading my aimless inquiries with a slight tone of embarrassment. I noticed pictures of various bicycles taped to the wall above his desk, so I asked if he liked bicycles. He said he did and kept working. Now that's what I call cross-pollination!

We buzzed out the art school and went to the cafeteria. Hunger strike over. There were two options on the menu: Eastern style or Western style. I choose the latter and sat down to a nice Cajun salad. Extreme hunger sneaked the soggy, tasteless food past my vigilant taste buds, and I ate everything on my plate. After lunch, we found a closed tea place, but decided not to go in. Instead we took a bus to a Manga café. Manga is anime in comic book form. An attractive older woman led us to the a booth under the air conditioner vent and took our order. I got the usual, lotus tea. In the interim between request and fulfillment, my friends chose their reading material from the circumscribing bookshelves. The place was packed with serialized manga comics. We sipped our beverages and read in silence. Since all the mangas were in Korean, I read a rip-roarious Nabokov short story. A poet fakes his own death, and then shows up at his own statue dedication ceremony. Everyone thinks the real poet is an imposter! I took a nap, and when I woke up, Je Je had to go. Hi Ho Hi Ho! I said goodbye and took a train to the National History Museum of Korea. The spacestation-like structure grew in size as I approached it, because I was moving and it was not. I felt threatened by culture and physically unequal to the task before me. How could I see it all? Before I could act, I drank an Americano, ate a chocolate muffin, and made some executive decisions. Stone tools and earthenware were out. Nothing before people could actually make cool-looking stuff. That took care of the first floor. Non-Korean Asian art could go too. 3rd floor... done. That left me only calligraphy, painting, and wood-



work (which I skipped). I started with calligraphy. The unknown letters quickly became abstractions, so instead of reading, I followed the winding trails of ink, pausing my glance, to absorb the curves of their expression. No matter how masterful the stroke, the ink flowed through the channels of its own nature. Next I checked out the paintings. A hazy painting caught my art-satiated gaze, so I stopped and August 5 continued read the blurb. Long ago, Prince Anyong had a dream about a "Peach Blossom Land." When he woke, he ordered a court painter to materialize his vision. I wonder if the prince was satisfied, for the translation of a dream is not the dream itself. I left the museum

adequately nourished and took a train to Je Je's Academy. Two hours: no seats: and hot. When I got to the train stop by the Academy, I took a cab the rest of the way. There was a soap playing on the GPS. A woman was kneeling before a man. She rubbed her supplicating hands together but the friction did not warm the heart of her superior. I met Je Je after class, and we went to dinner with a co-worker. Ashley talked to us about her Hawaiian honeymoon plans. Je Je and I hopped a train to Bupyeon Station to meet some high school friends, hers not mine. We found a quiet watering hole and settled in for the evening. Conversation flowed pleasantly. I mostly talked to Jeong Ju, who studied in Dallas. I didn't get a chance to talk to the girl who looked just like Snow White.

Teleported back to the United States!

The End